

My colleagues here may never have heard of Central Hudson, but the people of the Hudson Valley know them all too well.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today for the farmer in Ulster Park, New York, who received such a massive utility bill, \$16,585, 17 times her normal bill, that she actually contemplated suicide. She described the debt, which put her at risk of losing her family farm, as a guillotine hanging over her head.

I rise for the single mother in Kingston who told me she is afraid to cook for her four kids because turning on the stove means facing a gigantic gas bill.

For the mayor of our city of Newburgh, who received a bill of \$708,000 for a single month of electricity at his three-bedroom family home; for senior citizens on a fixed income who had their entire checking accounts wiped out by an autopay withdrawal.

I could tell hundreds more of these stories and still not scratch the surface of this incredible corporate ineptitude.

Mr. Speaker, we rely on our public utilities for a necessary service. They exist for the public good. They are built on a foundation of public trust.

Central Hudson, and its CEO, Mr. Charles Freni, have irrevocably broken this trust. Since my calls for an investigation into Central Hudson's disastrous billing practices almost a year ago, we have received more than 11,000 formal complaints. A New York State Department of Public Service report revealed Central Hudson's billing system was riddled with hundreds of programming errors, leading to nearly 5,000 customers not receiving their bills, 8,000 customers overcharged, and more than 30,000 customers whose autopay was billed incorrectly, costing them over \$16 million.

I want to be clear. I do not fault the hardworking employees of Central Hudson. They begged for additional training. They suggested improvements to this system. They worked hours and hours of overtime. They wanted to do the right thing for the people of the Hudson Valley, but Central Hudson and its CEO clearly did not.

Just 2 weeks ago in response to this devastating Public Service Commission report documenting their systemic failures, Central Hudson doubled-down on their deflection, their denial, and their deception. Rather than taking ownership of their failures, they claimed that no customers were overcharged and that nobody lost any money.

Give me a break.

Central Hudson's leadership deliberately chose to sweep these problems under the rug. Why?

Because now owned by a multibillion-dollar and multinational corporation, they chose to put profits over people. At the same time as customers'—my constituents'—bills were skyrocketing and bank accounts were literally being emptied out, their reve-

nues were up over 30 percent and their profits—surprise, surprise—they are up, too.

Central Hudson has had opportunity after opportunity to own their mistakes and take accountability, but time and again they have failed to do so.

Mr. Speaker, there is simply no excuse for this. At a time when our families are facing tremendous economic pressure, the last thing they need to worry about is their bank accounts being emptied out just because they tried to power their home.

Because of these failures and because of Central Hudson's continued unwillingness to take accountability, today I am calling on Central Hudson's CEO, Mr. Charles Freni, to do the right thing for our community and to resign.

We need a new leader who will come in, improve service, finally fix these systemic problems, and start the critical work to rebuild trust with our community. That is what the people of the Hudson Valley deserve.

DOCTORS KNOW BEST

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. MCCORMICK) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Mr. Speaker, I want to address the Freedom for Healthcare Workers Act that has been submitted and we will soon vote on.

As an ER physician who has treated thousands of patients, who has been exposed to COVID thousands of times, and watched nurses and midlevels and healthcare workers of all kinds complain about the government's involvement in healthcare, I wanted to address this topic.

I believe I am the only Congressman who has actually been an ER doctor in the pandemic. My last shift was December 28. I intubated a patient and saw three critical patients. Several of them had COVID. Nobody was admitted for COVID, though.

Back to the point, though. During this pandemic we started off with no vaccination. Meanwhile, most of us were exposed regardless of what PPE we had, and it was limited at times to people who had fevers, who had symptoms even before we knew what COVID was. A lot of us got sick and developed immunity naturally.

Then the government stepped in. Although well-meaning, a lot of times government officials think they have the answer to everything, including things they really don't know about. What they will do is cherry-pick the experts that agree with them to say this is what experts believe, and that is why all healthcare professionals should believe this also. That is not how we make progress in medicine. As a matter of fact, it stifles innovation and progress.

At one time we had a President, President Garfield, who was shot, and it was poor practice in medicine where

doctors probed his wound and made him septic that caused him to die. There was a dissenting opinion by Dr. Lister—you may have heard of Listerine—who believed in antiseptic but he was scoffed at and belittled because he was the outlying person. Imagine where we would be if government stepped in and said: Our experts said you don't need to wash your hands before you probe wounds. We would still be in the Dark Ages of medicine.

I beg the government to stay out of the way of healthcare progress. To stay out of the debate of healthcare professionals because, quite frankly, very few people in Congress understand medicine the way healthcare professionals do. They haven't been to medical school, and even those who have, they haven't been in medicine for a long time. Quite frankly, the Doctors Caucus is seldom relied on for healthcare policy, which is a shame.

If you haven't been to medical school, if you haven't taken your boards, if you haven't been through a residency, if you haven't seen tens of thousands of patients, you shouldn't be telling doctors who have a dissenting opinion what to do.

There is no standard of care based on government. It is based on physicians having a good decision, trying different things, and finding out what works. That is how medicine has progressed in America; far beyond any limitations that we have in foreign countries.

We are the leaders of innovation and healthcare. We should consider our healthcare professionals when we make decisions and not consider government first when it comes to standard of care.

If you want to require healthcare professionals to have a vaccination, why do you think the government understands that requirement better than the very healthcare professional who not only treats this but was exposed to it, who has natural immunities, and who understands the side effects; not only of the disease but of the vaccination.

Once again, I submit to you that it is time to let healthcare professionals make their own decisions, especially when it comes to their own lives. They are the ones that put their lives on the line during the pandemic. They are the ones that treated the sick patients. They are the ones that know best whether a vaccination will benefit them or harm them, not a government.

I must also remind you that our Constitution is based on individual rights, not on a collective governance by politicians telling people what to do in things they don't know about.

Mr. Speaker, I hope we support the Freedom for Healthcare Workers Act.

RECOGNIZING THE LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENTS OF ANGELO K. TSAKOPOULOS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. BERA) for 5 minutes.